

VZCZCXR06999

OO RUEHAG RUEHAO RUEHCD RUEHGD RUEHHO RUEHMC RUEHNG RUEHNL RUEHRD
RUEHROV RUEHRS RUEHSL RUEHSR RUEHMT
DE RUEHCV #1523/01 3372211
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O R 032211Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0091
INFO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001523

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/12/03

TAGS: PREL PHUM VE

SUBJECT: RE: Second Student Led Hunger Strike at Risk of Fizzling Out

REF: 09 CARACAS 1489; 09 CARACAS 1389; 09 CARACAS 1292
09 CARACAS 1279; 09 CARACAS 1269

CLASSIFIED BY: DUDDY, AMBASSADOR, DOS, AMB; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Two weeks after the November 21 announcement by student activist Julio Rivas of a second student-led hunger strike to demand a visit by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH), the number of students participating in the hunger strike has dropped from its peak of 35 down to 29, with no sign that more students will join their ranks. Unlike the October hunger strike (ref e) that quickly gained momentum, this hunger strike risks fizzling out as the holiday season approaches. Perhaps in an effort to increase public attention, Rivas announced on December 3 that some of the students would cease their IV drips. Fissures in the student movement have begun to emerge over Rivas' tactics. End Summary.

Number of Hunger Strikers on the Decline

¶2. (C) Per ref a, on November 19, student activist Julio Rivas told Polcouns and Human Rights Officer that he planned to announce a second hunger strike and targeted protests at various diplomatic missions during a student demonstration planned for November 21 (ref A). Their goal would be to increase international pressure on the Venezuelan government (GBRV) to accept a visit by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH). He said he expected about 50 students to participate in the hunger strike, which would take place in front of the OAS Mission in Caracas as well as in various cities across the country. By November 28, 35 students had joined the hunger strike: 25 in Caracas, and 10 in Aragua, Carabobo, and Merida. Andreina Blanco, the daughter of detained Caracas Prefect Richard Blanco, was among those participating in the hunger strike. In the two weeks since the hunger strike began, 6 students, including Blanco, abandoned the strike for health-related reasons. On December 3, Alfredo Romero, the lawyer representing the students, told the Embassy that 29 students remained on hunger strike: 18 in Caracas and 11 in Aragua, Carabobo and Merida .

Dissension within the Student Movement

¶3. (C) Student leaders Sara Hanna Georges, Bernardo Pulido, Roberto Patino and Carlos Graffe (please protect all), who participated in the student delegation that traveled to Washington and met with the CIDH in early November, told Polcouns and Human Rights Officer on November 23 that Julio Rivas had not consulted them about the November 19 attempted occupation of seven embassies in Caracas (ref a) or the hunger strike. They said they disagreed with the occupation of the embassies, which they feared would alienate potential diplomatic allies, and did not plan to participate in the hunger strike, which they said was too important a tool to be used too frequently and thereby trivialized. They also expressed concern about Rivas' message, which they said was too focused on a call for the CIDH visit and not sufficiently on the other political and social concerns of the student movement. In general, they were clearly troubled by the more militant approach being taken by Rivas' group in the name of the student movement. However, they said that in the interest of the movement they did not plan to speak out publicly about their differences.

CARACAS 00001523 002 OF 002

¶4. (C) The day prior to the hunger strike, the Human Rights Officer had met with several prominent student leaders at the University of Carabobo. The students gave no indication of the planned hunger strike and, when pressed, several complained of having to travel to Caracas for a meeting on November 21, saying "they weren't even sure what the meeting was about."

¶5. (C) On November 28, the daily "El Universal" published an article quoting some students as saying that Rivas had "contaminated the actions taken by other students who had also worked to secure a visit by the CIDH." The article noted that while none of the students had publicly criticized the hunger strike, clearly the second hunger strike threatened to undercut the good will of OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza. The article went on to claim that "many of the students were surprised by the sudden, non-consultative decision by Rivas and the Venezuelan United Active Youth (JAVU) wing calling for a second hunger strike."

Another Hunger Striker Protesting Nationalization of Property

¶6. (SBU) Separate from the student-led hunger strike, well-known biologist and farmer, Franklin Brito, remains on a hunger strike that he began on July 12, his sixth hunger strike in 6 years. His goal is to regain title over his nationalized farm. Embassy understands that he is in very serious condition as a result of this 4-month hunger strike.

Comment

¶7. (C) Unlike the October 2009 student hunger strike, which began with 33 students and grew within a week to an estimated 100-150 students, journalists, unionists, and prisoners (ref e), this hunger strike shows no signs yet of broadening its appeal or increasing its numbers. Rivas' announcement of the decision by several students to end their IV drips and thereby increase their health risk suggests a last-ditch effort to regain the prominent domestic and international attention the students achieved in October. Post does not expect the GBRV to accede to the students' demand for a CIDH visit.

DUDDY